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ABSTRACT

Career education is for all people of all ages and has, as its common denominator, interaction among them. The concept underlying career education goes beyond academic and vocational activities to encompass the self actualization of each individual. Career education could be the vehicle by which a total view of the self worth of the individual is promulgated. It has been considered synonymous with relevancy but, although curriculum relevancy may provide the means for making a living, it won't bring compatibility with life's forces. We must reinstill the virtues of honesty, integrity, perseverance, humility, and personal courage. Educators must foster in each student a sensitiveness for his singular uniqueness and dignity in a meaningful and responsible relationship to his society and himself. (MS)

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CAREER EDUCATION - A CAVEAT

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Career Education remains as yet undefined. One attempt explains it as "an educational delivery system for all levels of education which focuses on the development of mature decision making skills and which programs academic and vocational activities based on an individual's current, though usually tentative, career decisions." ¹

And still another expresses the view that career education "would expose the student to the range of career opportunities, help him narrow down the choices in terms of his own aptitudes and interests, and provide him with education and training appropriate to his ambition. Career education is basically a point of view, a concept -- a concept that says three things: First, that career education will be part of the curriculum for all students, not just some. Second, that it will continue throughout a youngster's stay in school from the first grade through senior high and beyond, if he so elects. And third, that every student leaving school will possess the skills necessary to give him a start in making a livelihood for himself and his family, even if he leaves before completing high school." ²

While Career Education is certainly all of these, it is also, in my opinion, much more. The above definition taunts our imaginations to remain content and confined within the formal, almost stereotyped, frameworks of accepted educational procedures of the past. It lacks the excitement that comes from challenging the unknown and further hints that its concepts are already fully fathomed and needs only time and money to bring it to its full fruition. In short, it is misleading because it lacks mystery; and Career Ed, for want of a better term, is replete with the mystery that comes with the treatment of the whole condition of man - his ability not only to make a living for himself, but a life as well.

Career Ed addresses itself to the entire community of men and women, young and old, and has, as its common denominator for success and survival, the interaction and communication among all these people. No one-way streets in this program. Everyone gets involved: parents, pupils, teachers, administrators, shop owners, laborers, school committee people, civic clubs, religious organizations, retirees, all.

The concept underlying the Career principle goes beyond the "academic and vocational activities" referred to in the above definition. The concept will accept nothing short of the self-actualization of each individual, proceeding on the principle that the whole community is the sum of its parts.

And this self-actualization won't be content with the adage "everyone must do his own thing" since few people understand themselves well enough to know what their "own thing" is. Doing one's "own thing," in ignorance, quickly degenerates into wanton disregard of other people's "own thing" and too often leaves us with polarized segments of the community who are content being carbon copies of each other within their own polarized fields, frustratingly aware that recognition is a poor substitute for identity.

We begin Career Education then on the premise that dignity is essential to the successful evolution of the individual; that everyone is his own person and that his self-worth is reflected, by necessity, within the whole mutation of mankind. He is a single stitch upon the whole fabric of human society.

If we cannot agree upon a beginning social value, however nebulous, we would be guilty of further promulgating the nihilistic attitude that man's existence is solely self-serving, controlled only by his desire to survive, and punctuated by unavoidable inconveniences in a consumming quest to find pleasure and satisfaction.

It is absolutely essential that an overhaul of education be done with these broad ramifications in mind. Career Education could be the vehicle by which a total view of the human being be promulgated. The details of scheduling, inservice training of professionals and non-professionals alike, curriculum revisionings, financing, certification modifications at State levels, steering committees, revisions of labor laws and union regulations, communication networks and apparatuses, and others, are pedagogically, politically, and economically capable of solution.

It is the philosophic commitment to the ideology of "making a living as well as a life" that will cause the greatest drain on energy; for it is in this area alone that semanticists, dialecticians, and intellectual snobberists in general have so long kept the population of peoples confused and isolated from their human heritages - heritages to which mens' memories and aspirations run not the contrary; but in which, unfortunately, there is a current paranoia of anxiety and separation.

Our young people have inherited a system of thought which flaunts predeterminism, apathy, and dislocation. But by concentrating the efforts of the establishment upon increasing the self-awareness and consciousness of the individual, we could look optimistically to the day when the internalization of self-worth and mutual compatibilities become a reality. If we dilute our goals in this respect, then Career Education would have to become just another band-aid in man's incessant fixation upon doing the world over in his own unsettled image.

Just as many church-supported schools of the past found that too heavy a reliance on Thomistic doctrine left their proteges unprepared for Comte, Nietzsche, and Marx, so too have many of their public counterparts discovered that Dewey, Skinner, and Piaget left much to be desired in elevating the student's prospectus of himself as a unique and self-governing entity.

In our panic to attain civil rights, human rights, and individual rights, we have shifted our naivete from the search for the perfect government to the impatient anticipation of the perfect individual. Our intellectual conquests to date, small though they be, have encouraged us to be complacent within our blatant disassociation from the aesthetic, the intuitive, and affective domains that electrify the human condition. To desire perfectness is healthy. To grow anxious for it is fool-hardy. To accept our creatureness as imperfect is healthy. To surrender it to fate is folly.

An educator who recently listened to some of these ideas stated his position clearly when he asked "What you're really proposing here is 'happy, happy times; happiness for everybody' aren't you?" Contrare. What is proposed is a fusion of the cognitive with the affective. Too long have we genuflected before the altar of intellectualism; an intellectualism gelded of those basic values of self-worth, integrity, responsibility, and humble respect for the rights, properties, and opportunities of others. Our persistent dependency upon hard-data, statistical, measurable phenomena, with the attending submission to the shrine of constant modernism, uncertain of its duty to its clientele and unstable in its responsibility to the future, must certainly sterilize the spirit of mankind by incubating it from its total environment. And this would have to be considered unnatural.

For many others, Career Education has been held to be synonymous with relevancy. Relevancy is the "in" word today. If something isn't relevant, then get rid of it; and so it would go.

We seem to have been captured by an intellectual climate of extremes. Something is either all good, or all bad; all essential, or completely worthless; all relevant, or utterly useless. Until, of course, it comes to our own personal actions. Then relevancy takes on an entirely allusive characteristic dependent upon our mood or passion of the moment. At that point in time, there becomes only one absolute - the absolute of the passing appetite and fad. It would be a mistake in judgement to gear up for Career Ed solely on the theory of relevancy. For one important aspect that must be kept in mind when constructing a career education program and its related emphasis upon relevancy to the occupational needs and desires of the clientele, is the high degree of frustration with the accompanying awareness of low self-expectancy. For even meaningful employment will not quiet the nagging covetousness for the summer resort or mountain retreat, that most will never acquire. The constant electronic exposure to the "things" that affluence will buy will always be just out of reach for most. Relevancy won't still the disquieted soul. Curriculum "relevancy" may provide the means for making a living but it won't buy compatibility with life's forces.

A student, of whatever age, should be given a wide choice of career options, trained in his ability to make critical appraisals, allowed on-going opportunities to make decisions, encouraged to accept responsibilities, and provided with the means of gaining proficiency in his chosen field. But unless we re-instill those virtues of honesty, integrity, perseverance, humility, and personal courage, then the student will remain incontinent and the whole endeavor will be fruitless.

Educators must be instrumental in energizing the student's propensity for responding to his somatic/mental/spiritual/and psychic needs. Educators must foster within each student a sensitiveness for his singular uniqueness, both to himself and his world.

Attitude, then, is the key. For most often, whether we rise or fall, succeed or fail, go forward or remain inert, depends upon the attitude that we bring to bear on our consciousness. And this attitude must be directed towards dignity; a dignity which finds natural evolution from a posture of meaningful and responsible relationship to one's society and himself.

The last 50 years has seen us remove young men and women, endowed with natural and predestined capabilities of contributing to society's needs, from the realities of responsibilities and placing them in quiet escrow for an unnatural six or so years until such time as they can be conveniently absorbed into that sophisticated clientele commonly referred to as adults. Television has aggravated its intensity by exposing them to the realities of this situation. Career Ed would move these youngsters out into the community where they can recapture a dignity that is rightfully theirs.

As you can see from the foregoing, we've made a complete circle. From an educational delivery system which "focuses on the development of mature decision-making skills," we proceeded to provide for the student a wide-view perspective of career potentials and choices, with the emphasis on relevancy. And finally, we observed that career alternates with attending decision-making skills are only two points on the circumference of adaptability and progression within the family of man. We added a third point and a fourth point, that of attitude and value, to help temper the idealistic with the realistic, and the optimism of success with the pangs of achievement, respectively.

But like any circle, the path of self-actualization and fulfillment is composed of an infinite array of points. If we are willing to face this reality within the various kingdoms of man, if we refuse to surrender the mysteries and challenges of the human spirit to the test tubes of hierarchical commands of expediency, then we just might stand proudly accused of recreating a society which reflects the true image and likeness of man's insatiable quest to "reach the unreachable star."

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